

**JOHN LOFTON****Is this any way to treat a spook?**

**C**all me an old-fashioned, moss-backed, reactionary stick-in-the mud, but I like the more traditional way of dealing with spies: you give them a blindfold, a cigarette and then you shoot them.

Nowadays? Well, nowadays we do things a little differently and, if I may say so, not quite as effectively, or so it seems to a lay person.

Oh, sure, the Soviets say that it is "quite clear" that we treated KGB agent Vitaly Yurchenko in a "pre-planned, monstrously inhumane" way that cannot be described as anything other than "a flagrant, trampling upon human rights and dignity, a gross violation of elementary norms of relations between states and of international law." And they say this was "state terrorism" on the part of our country.

But the facts of this bizarre case, to the extent they are discernible, seem to indicate otherwise. Instead of executing this guy, who reportedly was (is?) the deputy chief of the KGB directorate that supervises all spy operations in the United States and Canada, a CIA man takes him to dinner at a French restaurant in Georgetown — the Au Pied de Cochon (which means "at the foot of the pig") — and he splits. He just walks away into the night. And later he shows up at the Soviet Embassy, where he holds a "news conference."

In addition, Mr. Yurchenko says the CIA tried to get his signature on a contract that would give him a \$1 million down payment and \$62,500 a year (with an adjustment for inflation!). And he says he was also to get another \$48,000 worth of furniture. One news account says this offer, if made, would have been consistent with the way the CIA has treated other so-called defectors.

But, putting aside the admittedly arguable question of whether it is torture to dine at a French restaurant in Georgetown (reasonable men, even spies, can disagree about this), it does not seem accurate to say that the way Mr. Yurchenko was treated was "monstrously inhumane" and/or an act of "state terrorism."

Sen. David Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, chairman of the

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, says Mr. Yurchenko wasn't drugged and wasn't held in chains, which is why he was able to escape to the Soviet Embassy. But why not? Even if Mr. Yurchenko was, as he says, forcibly abducted in Rome, brought to the United States, kept in isolation and drugged, so what? I mean, the guy was a spy, and international espionage ain't beanbag. And if he was kidnapped and isolated and drugged, he was merely being treated the way the KGB treats people in the Soviet Union and others around the world, right? So what's the gripe? Spying is serious business. And if a spy is caught, or even turns himself in, he shouldn't expect to be treated with kid gloves.

Only in today's America — the home of the brave, the free, and, increasingly, the stupid — could a spy like Mr. Yurchenko be allowed to come and go of his own free will. Amazing. Incredible. And, as I say, very, very stupid.

Now, I have very little sympathy for Soviet or any other kind of spies who are stealing our country's secrets. But, in a sense, one's heart does go out to Mr. Yurchenko. And I am here alluding to that part of his story in which he alleges that while drugged he met with CIA Director William Casey. Mr. Yurchenko says: "Later I have only vague recollections of the conversation, but it was a general conversation of vague policy issues regarding the summit — the things they usually write about in the newspapers."

Well, now. In the past, I, too, have talked with Mr. Casey. And the only recollections one can have after talking with this man are vague recollections. Lucidity is not his strong suit. In fact, it has been said that Mr. Casey is the only head of a federal agency who does not need a spy-proof scrambler phone because his speech is already scrambled. Perhaps this characteristic ought to be a prerequisite for holding the top CIA job. I'm not sure. But, in any event, this is the way the man talks. And after our conversations, when I later attempted to make sense of my notes, I distinctly remember thinking that one of us must have been on drugs.

Assessing the Yurchenko foul-up, Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, says, with typical New England understatement: "No matter what, something went wrong." Former CIA official George Carver says the handling of Mr. Yurchenko was "something less than optimal." Indeed, gentlemen, indeed.

And prior to Mr. Yurchenko's returning to the Soviet Union, the State Department said it had to be convinced that this action was "genuinely of his own choosing," that he had to be interviewed "in an environment free of Soviet coercion to satisfy ourselves about his real intentions." Huh? Mr. Yurchenko had to be talked with in an environment free of Soviet coercion before being allowed to return to the coercive environment that is the Soviet Union?! Yep, that's what the striped-pants gang running Foggy Bottom said. They had to be sure this spy was freely deciding to return to a life of slavery in service to the Soviet state.

Sen. Leahy says there are an awful lot of senators of both parties who are very angry, and rightly so, over the way Mr. Yurchenko was mishandled. He says: "You assume the CIA are trained professionals, that they know what they're doing. That assumption is now being questioned."

Well, let's hope so. But there would be no such questioning going on had Mr. Yurchenko been shot.

Dead men don't walk out of restaurants. And nobody would be offering a stiff more than a million bucks of our hard-earned tax dollars. No way.

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